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CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONSERVATION

IN the course of an examination of various idealistic systems certain difficulties have suggested themselves. One of these, which may be of interest, involves the problem of conservation. The idea of conservation has become so familiar from our commerce with the so-called external world that the full significance of the fact that we do not demand it in our dealings with consciousness seldom strikes home. Is psychology here completely at fault, or has this principle no sway in the psychical realm? Glancing at the development of psychology since its alliance with physiology, one is inclined to say that a deeper reason than the one usually assigned motivated their union. Ideas, so far as we can discover by introspection, have no permanence, do not continue to exist when they pass out of consciousness. "We may still speak of ideas being stored in the mind and being associated together just as we may still say of a man that he carries the image of his beloved in his heart, but the two expressions have the same sort of validity only. They are picturesque survivals from the age of ignorance."[1] Both structural and functional psychology, as a consequence, rely on the brain for continuity. But if this is so, is not reality continually changing? It may still be that the old maxim holds that "nothing comes from nothing," but it can no longer be true that "nothing is destroyed." Each experience of mine is unique and is as evanescent as a passing shadow.

The reasons for the affirmations of things which exist whether we experience them or no, and of the parallel doctrines of the conservation of matter and of energy, need not concern us. Suffice it to point out that idealism recognizes ultimately only the reality of *conscious experience.* If so, must not idealism deny the conservation of reality?

For personal idealism the conclusion is especially interesting, since appeal can not be made to the mysteries of an unknowable absolute whose timelessness precludes all question of change. If reality is composed of finite experiencers and there is no death, reality must increase continually, or at least *may* increase. For either all began at once, and this is nothing other than the assertion that the universe arose spontaneously and the denial of *ex nihilo nihil fit,* or they did not arise together, and this implies that reality is increasing. That all individuals came into existence together, all laws of heredity, Mendelian and Galtonian, deny, unless a most peculiar and static architectonic is permitted, contrary to all evolutionary postulates. If, however, immortality be negated as the present tendency inclines, might not all die and reality cease in the twinkling of an eye? No more than Hume could be certain of the rising of the sun to-morrow, could idealism be assured of the continued existence of the universe. But if it be rejoined that, though experiencers may die, experience is always with us, is this not an appeal to a mind-stuff which rearranges itself, and have we any empirical grounds for such a position? As I have indicated, does not psychology deny a resurrection of past experiences as such, frowning upon the myth of a hades where they await disconsolately a return to the sunlit upper world?

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[1] MacDougal, "Physiological Psychology," p. 119.

Before drawing my moral, I wish to justify the thesis that the mind-body relation is metaphysical, and not merely methodological, by an analysis of an idealist's position. "Now that we have found that at least a part of that order, namely, the bodies of our fellow men, are not mere complexes in our own experience, but have a further existence as themselves experiencing subjects and are so far *'independent'* of their actual presentation in our own experience, we can no longer conclude from the dependence of the physical order for its sensible properties upon presentation to ourselves that it has no further existence of its own."[2] If the physical world is, as Mr. Taylor asserts, *more than* its being perceived, the *body upon the individual's demise* must also be more than its perception in other consciousnesses. Hence a duality is forced to the front; for if immortality is granted, the body is other than the immortal part, since it disintegrates; and the problem is raised for us, How were the individual and the reality represented to us by the body related during life? And if immortality is not granted, a like problem asserts itself, since the body remains in this case also and was, therefore, *more* than the individual's conscious experiences. In short, immortality is dualistic and renders meaningless the complex neuroses which now accompany consciousness.

This relative independence of the organism has direct connection with the problem of conservation, and this was my reason for introducing it. In contrast to the lack of conservation of consciousness is the conservation, not of the organization of the body necessarily, but of its so-called "additive" properties. Elsewhere I have called attention to the importance of organization as supplying the place in modern science of the qualitative. It is like the qualitative and like consciousness in that it is not ultimately conserved, *e. g.*, in organisms at death. To those unacquainted with physical chemistry the term "additive," used above, may require explanation. "In the first class we have those properties which are possessed by the atoms unchanged, no matter in what physical or chemical state these atoms may exist. Such properties are called additive, and the best instance of an additive property is found in weight (or mass). Each atom retains its weight unaltered whether it exists in the free state or whether it is combined with other atoms. When atoms combine the weight of the compound is the sum of the weights of the component atoms.''[3] In modern energetics this principle holds without the accompaniment of atomism.

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[2] Taylor, "Elements of Metaphysics," p. 207.

My query is this, May not the quantitative be related to the qualitative and to consciousness and organization as the invariant is to the variant in mathematics, so that we may have conservation of the quantitative and non-conservation of the qualitative? Naturally this involves a reinterpretation of conservation as applied to reality. But is not this reinterpretation shadowed forth in the most general definition of reality, ''to be is to be active''? If this were so, the quantitative identity of cause and effect could still remain an ideal not conflicting with the doctrine of *grades of causal relation* depending upon organization, which biology is demanding. Physics has been more mechanical than chemistry because dealing with more general and external relations; it has also been more *a priori* and less empirical. Recent investigations, however, are destroying the barriers and the evolution of the elements and, therewith, the fact of organization is being acknowledged. That there must be grades of causal relation depending on the degree of organization of the interacting terms has not yet been fully recognized although biology, physiology, and chemistry have a suspicion of it. The reaction of an organism as a whole to a stimulus as indicated by Jennings brings out my meaning. In biology, for example, fertility and infertility are seen to be due to surface tension, which varies with the species. Mendelian characters, also, present the effect of evolutionary organization, and natural selection itself can be interpreted as a process of development of grades of causal relation. In fact, this is what adaptation means. The doctrine of specific nerve energies and the differentiation of sense-organs and cerebral centers are also best understood by the application of this conception. Scientists and philosophers alike built up their theory of nature on the least complex things, and, lost in the antithesis of mechanism and teleology, did not realize that grades of causal relation due to organization mediate these extremes. ''Investigations in physical chemistry are well suited,'' says Pauli,[4] ''to show how all biological methods are of the same value in that they leave no room for strictly mechanistic or vitalistic tendencies.'' And the death of mechanism makes possible a solution of the mind-brain problem.

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[3] Walker, "Introduction to Physical Chemistry."

[4] "Physical Chemistry in the Service of Medicine."

Since my purpose is to suggest rather than to defend, I conclude this discussion of conservation with a protest against the reification of the primary qualities. Their use in descriptions of causation is merely symbolic, and not explanatory. Accordingly, ontological or real causation has never yet been understood, and there is, therefore, no good reason to look upon consciousness as ineffective and alien. As for energy, Hume's classic analysis must never be forgotten. It seems to me that only the realism which passes through idealism can hold its ground. We are then left, not with a dualism, but with a monism whose tentative utterance in regard to the mind-brain relation is of the nature of a functional identity in which organization and differentiation are the structural phases, while consciousness is the *distinct variant.* The understanding of this requires the adoption of the psychical attitude towards another's body, the making it a thing-in-itself.[5] There may, thus, be degrees of variancy corresponding to the plasticity of the individual.

Some of the logical inferences from this conclusion may be indicated. First, whereas idealism has emphasized the temporal relation between cause and effect and, in the interest of conservation, stressed quantitative identity, realism must place emphasis on spatial relationships and the organization of the interacting terms. The idealist lays weight upon temporal continuity of process because time, not space, is his important category; the realist recognizes that the world-process is stereometrical with complex differences in its nodes, the most instructive example being the relation between two men. Second, this position mediates between materialism—or shall we say energism?—and panpsychism. It can not admit panpsychism because, as brought out above, consciousness is a variant and seems to have meaning only in an organism's stress relations to its environment. On the other hand, energism must be interpreted in the light of evolution and due justice done to the qualitative and the presence of consciousness. Third, as regards personal experiencing, this position is pluralistic; I can not *be* you, though my experience is a ''microcosm'' with a focus symbolizing *you:* as regards reality, it is monistic and obtains this monism through the body. Fourth, as to the existence of any higher consciousness, this position is inclined to be positivistic and naturalistic. There are no reasons to give leverage to such a belief.

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[5] *Cf. Psychological Review,* September, 1907.